

VICTORY IN PENNSYLVANIA

Occasionally, we learn of problems within private communities, where homeowner's associations inhibit the expression of individual Christian faith. The most recent case of such a situation was in Chester Springs, Pennsylvania.

John McMahon, whose family recently purchased a house in a new development called Byers Station, wished to display a 24-inch statue of the Blessed Mother outside his home. McMahon and his wife, Cindy, erected the statue between his front steps and a shrub, not thinking this would cause any controversy. (They had inquired about putting such a statue outside their home before purchasing, and were only informed that swimming pools and basketball hoops were off limits.)

Shortly afterward, however, the McMahons received a letter from the Byers Station Homeowner's Association stating that if they wanted to keep the statue outside, they would have to submit a form requesting permission. The McMahons dutifully complied with the order and sent in the form. They were shocked by the answer they received.

A letter from the board of directors of the community association denied the McMahon's application for permission to keep the statue. The board's explanation was as follows: "Some homeowners in the community may take offense to a religious statue and therefore, the Board has decided not to approve this request. The Board is requesting the statue be moved either inside your home, or placed in the backyard so that it is not viewable from the street."

The McMahons saw the absurdity of the board's decision, and quickly contacted the Catholic League, as well as a number of other organizations and the local media (who jumped at the chance to publicize the story), to request assistance. Bill Donohue quickly fired off a letter to the Byers Station

Community Association asking them to rescind the order that the McMahons remove the statue.

Donohue asked the members of the board: "Have you considered that this ruling is precedent setting? Are you prepared to enact this ban on religious items across the board? Doing so will mean barring menorahs during Hanukkah, crèches during Christmas and even small garden angels.

"I also wonder about your assumption that residents of Byers Station are so quick to be offended by symbols of religion. Is Byers Station a haven of intolerance? After all, no one save a bigot is bothered by seeing others express their faith."

Since being contacted by the league and being the target of a local media frenzy, the homeowner's association has decided to drop the ridiculous ban on the Blessed Mother. The McMahons have been verbally informed that the statue can stay. In addition, another family in the community has placed a statue of the Blessed Mother on their lawn.